

Messaging Guide 2022

# **Advancing Women's and Gay Rights with a Lesbian-Centered Narrative**



**LESBIANS UNITED**  
[www.lesbians-united.org](http://www.lesbians-united.org)

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## Introduction

### Why center lesbians?

Today, the greatest threat to women's and gay rights is a political movement that calls itself "the trans rights movement." Contrary to its claims, this movement is not concerned with winning rights for anyone. It is concerned with taking rights away. And its primary targets are lesbians.

At its core, the self-styled "trans rights movement" is an anti-lesbian movement. Its founding documents were written by men who fetishize lesbians; its propaganda teams are operating out of captured lesbian organizations; its false-flag acronym begins with "L" for "lesbian." Its early achievements included the closure of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, the erasure of lesbian icon Stormé DeLarverie, and the murder of lesbian couple Patricia Wright and Charlotte Reed. It pushes for the medicalization of lesbian adults and teens under the label of "transition," and the sexual coercion of lesbians under the label of "the cotton ceiling."

Over the past decades, anti-lesbian activists have decimated the lesbian community. Yet lesbians remain the most vocal, hardworking, and uncompromising fighters for women's and gay rights.

#### A Unified Message

It's time for women's and gay rights activists to circle the wagons, and center lesbians in the fight to reclaim our rights. Centering lesbians prioritizes and protects the preferred targets of the anti-lesbian movement. It also provides an opportunity for women's and gay rights activists to unify around a single, coherent message.

Fighting for lesbians means fighting for women and gay people simultaneously. By signaling support for lesbians, we implicitly align ourselves with both women's rights and gay rights causes—a one-two punch to the neo-sexist, neo-homophobic activists who have tried so hard to rebrand us as bigots.

When lesbians win, *all* women and gay people win.

## Our Strategy: Positivity

Positive spin is a winning strategy. By framing their attacks on women's and gay rights as a positive, progressive fight for equality, sexist and homophobic ideologues have cultivated good PR, and garnered support from voters and politicians. They have also been able to turn women's and gay rights activists into pariahs, by using negative language such as "anti-trans," "trans exclusionary," and "trans-phobic" to describe us.

When women's and gay rights activists define ourselves in the negative—as "gender critical" or "team terf," we assist anti-lesbian activists in painting us into a corner of negativity. We become trapped in a defensive position, forever explaining that we are not Nazis.

### Playing Offense

Women's and gay rights activists must stop playing defense and start playing offense. We can do this by arguing for what we want, and by making it clear that we are working toward positive change, rather than defending the status quo.

When speaking about women's and gay rights, consider: What rights are women and gay people currently being denied, and what stigmas do they face? What positive actions can be taken, and what new policies can be enacted to improve the situation?

**Women's and gay rights activists want ...**

... safe spaces for women and girls.

... equal access to healthcare for lesbians.

... to end the stigma against same-sex relationships.

When we talk about our opponents, it's best to describe them in well-deserved negative terms, and to avoid using terms they coined themselves. To women's and gay rights activists, anti-lesbian activists represent the old status quo that must be changed.

We want positive change. They are the negative we want to change: regressive, sexist, homophobic, and anti-science.

If all women's and gay rights activists adopted positive, proactive messaging, the results would be immediate.

# Lesbian-Centered Narratives

The following sample narratives are intended to help women's and gay rights activists focus and structure their arguments. These narratives can be used word-for-word or paraphrased on webpages, social media, flyers, and organizational materials.

## Lesbian Inclusion

*We can use this narrative to promote the reinstatement of female-only safe spaces.*

Lesbians deserve the right to participate in public life. This is made possible by the existence of female-only safe spaces, including locker rooms and restrooms, where lesbians can undress, shower, or use the toilet free from the risk of male violence. When lesbians can access female-only safe spaces, their risk for victimization goes down, and their comfort level goes up.

Lesbians deserve the right to create their own lesbian-only safe spaces and hold lesbian-only events, and to have men, heterosexuals, and bisexuals respect their boundaries. We can build a truly inclusive society by empowering lesbians to maintain their personal boundaries and the boundaries of their community.

**The Takeaway:** Banning female-only safe spaces excludes lesbians from public life.

## Lesbian Health Matters

*We can use this narrative to oppose bans on exploratory talk therapy.*

Lesbians who have had traumatic experiences with sexism, homophobia, or assault often feel uncomfortable in their own skin. Lesbian women and girls deserve equal access to talk therapy, which can help them resolve difficulties with body image issues. When lesbians are able to access accepting, lesbian-inclusive therapy, they are less likely to become addicted to cosmetic surgery or mind-altering drugs like testosterone.

Banning talk therapy denies lesbians in distress access to compassionate, affirming care, and makes lesbians more likely to seek out drugs and body modification as coping mechanisms. Talk therapy bans are an attack on lesbian health, and lesbian health matters.

**The Takeaway:** Lesbians who have body image issues benefit from talk therapy.



## Authentic Lesbian Lives

*We can use this narrative to oppose needless medicalization.*

Living an authentic life means accepting your own body, personality, and sexual orientation. By accepting same-sex relationships and embracing women who don't dress to attract men, we empower lesbians to accept and embrace themselves, and live authentic lives.

When lesbians feel pressure to conform to society's stereotypes, they may turn to artificial hormones and plastic surgery, impersonating heterosexual men as a means of fitting in. Instead, all lesbians should be encouraged to practice self-love, accept their same-sex attraction, and take good care of their bodies.

**The Takeaway:** Lesbians who accept their own bodies are living authentic lives.

## Lesbian Visibility

*We can use this narrative to oppose rebranding lesbians as men.*

It's important for girls to have role models who are strong and independent, who have positive relationships with other women, and who don't dress for men's pleasure. Having strong female role models teaches girls that it's okay to break stereotypes, and that you don't have to be born male to be happy and successful.

When we embrace lesbians as women worthy of respect, we work toward true diversity by empowering women and girls to see the possibilities in their lives. Lesbian visibility teaches younger generations of women and girls that their sex doesn't determine where they go in life. They're free to live independently, dress however they want, and love whoever they choose.

**The Takeaway:** Lesbian visibility teaches girls that it's okay to break stereotypes.

## Lesbian Love Is Real Love

*We can use this narrative to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.*

Lesbian relationships are just as real and just as fulfilling as heterosexual relationships. Lesbians aren't missing out by turning down men. Men should leave lesbians alone, and let them live their lives in peace, free from stigma, harassment, and sexual coercion.

Lesbians aren't hurting anyone by having boundaries, or by enjoying their relationships. Pressuring lesbians to "try" heterosexual sex, or to "unlearn" their homosexuality, is simply regressive. Lesbians should not be forced to lie about whom they're attracted to or why. Instead of forcing lesbians back into the closet, we should be inclusive, and celebrate lesbian love.

**The Takeaway:** Lesbians shouldn't have to keep their sexual orientation secret.

## Ending Stigma Against Lesbians

*We can use this narrative to promote single-sex jails and accurate crime reporting.*

Like all women, lesbians are extremely unlikely to commit violent or sexual crimes. But our society often records heterosexual men's sex crimes as lesbian crimes. This wrongfully increases stigma against lesbians by blaming them for crimes committed by men.

We can help to destigmatize lesbians by creating a new system that records crimes based on sex. If we make accurate reporting a priority, we can ensure that the lesbian community is not blamed for men's crimes. We can build a more inclusive society, one where lesbians can participate fully in public life, free from discrimination and homophobia.

**The Takeaway:** Referring to heterosexual male criminals as lesbians increases stigma against lesbians.

## Responding to Anti-Lesbian Sentiment

When women's and gay rights activists engage in debate with anti-lesbian activists, it's important to remember who our real audience is. Proponents of anti-lesbian ideology are not likely to be persuaded to give up their sexism and homophobia. When we debate them, we do so not to change their minds—but to ensure that onlookers understand that we are on the side of lesbians, and our opposition is not.

**1. Ask the obvious questions.** In general, anti-lesbian activists are incapable of answering simple questions coherently, and without flying off the handle. If you ask simple questions, your opponent's answers will speak for themselves.

### Sample Questions:

- Do you believe that exclusive same-sex attraction is immoral?
- Are you suggesting that women shouldn't have sexual boundaries?
- Do you really think that comparing lesbians to men makes you sound progressive?
- Should lesbians be permitted to gather without male supervision?
- Why are you letting people with penises tell you what lesbians are?

**2. Call a bigot a bigot.** When you see sexism or homophobia, don't be afraid to call it out. Pointing out your opponent's bigotry makes it clear that you're on the side of lesbians, and they're not.

**Anti-lesbian argument:** No child should be asked to rethink their gender identity. It's time to ban conversion therapy.

**Pro-lesbian response:** Sarah, it's extremely homophobic of you to compare exploratory talk therapy to the horrors gay people have been put through in the name of "conversion therapy." You're minimizing the torture and sexual assault of thousands of lesbians and gay men.

Calling your opponent by name when pointing out their bigotry can often be helpful in putting them on the defensive.

**Anti-lesbian argument:** GCs will say that lesbians are women who only like women, and in the same breath they'll say that lesbians only like vaginas. Just say you have a genital fetish and go.

**Pro-lesbian response:** Trying to force lesbians to accept penises is really homophobic, Rob. And calling homosexuality a fetish? I can't believe you'd say something so disgustingly bigoted.



**3. Don't apologize or justify.** As someone who supports lesbian rights, you don't have to apologize for your political stance. Apologizing for your honesty, compromising with anti-lesbian language, and writing lengthy justifications of your position are all forms of *ceding ground*, which help your opponent to force you into a defensive position.

When making a political argument, your goal is to make your opponent back down or melt down. This means never backing down yourself.

**4. Stick to your main points.** In an attempt to disguise their sexism and homophobia, anti-lesbian activists rely on convoluted, confusing arguments with many tangents and ad hominem attacks. When women's and gay rights activists allow ourselves to be distracted from our main point, we are playing into our opponents' hands.

When a conversation with an anti-lesbian activist inevitably goes off the rails, check in with yourself. What is the main point you want others to take away from this exchange? Then, redirect the argument back to your main point, even if you have to completely ignore what your opponent is saying.

**5. Keep it simple.** Our message is a simple one: lesbians deserve to fully participate in society, without facing discrimination or violence, and without being subjected to medical experiments. When debating with anti-lesbian activists, stick to this simple message. Keep it short, keep calm, and use plain language that everyone can understand.

If your opponent's argument is too convoluted to be refuted quickly, consider summarizing it instead.

**Anti-lesbian argument:** GCs say that cis men are impersonating trans women so they can creep on women in the bathroom. Have y'all ever met a cis man? NO WAY would they lie about their gender identity just to get at women. It would hurt their fragile masculinity too much. Trans women are who they say they are!

**Pro-lesbian response:** Rahul, it sounds like you're saying that having a penis makes you incapable of lying.

Above all, **don't waste your own time**. You don't need to write a dissertation to back up your pro-lesbian stance. You don't need to thoroughly refute every lie your opponent tells. Stick to asking simple questions, pointing out bigotry, and repeating your main points using lesbian-inclusive language. Be reasonable, and let your opponent's irrationality speak for itself.

## Lesbian-Inclusive Language

Anti-lesbian activists have invented many terms that make it difficult to speak clearly about women and gay people. It is therefore vital that women's and gay rights activists avoid using that movement's language.

**Accurate language is lesbian-inclusive language.**

The following table presents some examples of common anti-lesbian wordings that are often mistakenly used by women's and gay rights activists, and suggests lesbian-inclusive replacements.

anti-lesbian wording	lesbian-inclusive wording	rationale
trans women	men; female impersonators	Going along with the lie that men can be women implies that lesbians should be attracted to men. This implication stigmatizes homosexuality and promotes the rape and sexual coercion of lesbians.
trans-identified males	men who lie about their sex	Referring to womanhood as an "identity" rather than a biological fact allows men to continue infiltrating the lesbian community and overturning lesbian rights in the law.
He identifies as a woman.	This man is saying he's a woman.	
Trans women are men.	Men are men, no matter what they say, what they wear, or what they do to their bodies.	The original statement is poorly-worded, confusing, and apparently self-contradictory.
trans rights activists	neo-homophobes; neo-sexists	People who tell lies about biological sex are not fighting for anyone's rights, nor are they pro-lesbian, as the "L" in "LGBTQ+" suggests. Rather, they are working against the rights of lesbians, all other women, and gay men.
the LGBTQ+ lobby	the anti-lesbian lobby	
LGBTQ+ organizations	homophobic hate groups	

anti-lesbian wording	lesbian-inclusive wording	rationale
gender	stereotypes of men and women	The word “gender” was coined by pedophilic doctor John Money. It has been used for decades to pathologize homosexuality and non-stereotypical behavior. Additionally, the lack of a stable definition for “gender” makes using it coherently impossible.
gender non-conforming women	women who don’t fit female stereotypes	
gender critical	pro-lesbian	
gender dysphoria	distress or confusion over biological sex	Validating the <i>DSM-V</i> entry for “gender dysphoria” aids the U.S. psychiatric establishment in pathologizing early signs of homosexuality in children.
Many lesbians have gender dysphoria.	Our society often shames lesbians, which can make lesbians feel uncomfortable in their own skin. Instead of helping lesbians to work through trauma and improve their self-image, therapists often diagnose lesbians in distress with so-called “gender dysphoria” in order to sell them drugs and surgery.	The original statement validates the homophobic <i>DSM-V</i> entry for “gender dysphoria,” and implies that mental illness is inherently tied to female homosexuality.
transition	medical abuse; medical experimentation	The term “transition” implies that human beings can successfully change sex (by “transitioning” from one sex to the other). Using this term assists Big Med and Big Pharma in encouraging lesbians to try to change their sex.

<b>anti-lesbian wording</b>	<b>lesbian-inclusive wording</b>	<b>rationale</b>
cross-sex hormones	wrong-sex hormones; artificial hormones	The terms on the left are designed to trivialize, euphemize, and normalize pseudo-medical procedures. It's important to use accurate language when describing these procedures, in order to convey how dangerous and abnormal they are.
top surgery	cosmetic mastectomy; breast implants	
bottom surgery	genital mutilation; castration; cosmetic genital surgery	
Many lesbians are transitioning.	The U.S. medical establishment is sterilizing lesbians and damaging their bodies in order to make them look like heterosexual men. This is eugenics. Doctors are turning lesbians into facsimiles of men, and making them dependent on Big Pharma for life.	The original statement both validates the concept of "transition" and implicitly blames lesbians for anti-lesbian eugenics. The revised statements accurately present lesbians as the victims of a homophobic medical experiment.
banning conversion therapy	denying lesbians access to healthcare	Referring to exploratory talk therapy as "conversion therapy" minimizes the serious harm conversion efforts cause to lesbians. In addition, banning exploratory talk therapy promotes conversion efforts by making medicalization the only option for lesbians who are suffering with body image issues.
It's not homophobic to speak out against transgenderism.	Transgenderism is homophobic.	The original statements sound defensive, and imply that anti-lesbian activism is somehow pro-human rights. The revised statements are simpler and leave no room for confusion.
I'm not transphobic.	I'm for gay rights.	

This messaging guide was created by Lesbians United, a lesbian-only, all-volunteer organization based in the United States. Lesbians United advocates for the health and well-being of lesbians and the lesbian community.

Visit [www.lesbians-united.org](http://www.lesbians-united.org) to learn more.



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